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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended to provide direction to volunteers and professionals working to reduce teenage alcohol abuse through public education efforts. It includes the most recent research on the alcohol-related knowledge, attitudes, and practices of youth. It also provides information on motivating adolescents to avoid alcohol or, if they have experimented, to stop or avoid regular use. The guide offers ways to plan and develop messages and materials about alcohol so that adolescents will respond favorably. Chapter 1 presents current research findings on adolescent alcohol use, attitudes, and knowledge and discusses reasons why adolescents use alcohol and the risks associated with its use. In chapter 2, communication strategies that have proved effective in educating and motivating youth to avoid alcohol and other drugs are described. Included are recommendations on selecting target groups, media, and message content. Chapter 3 outlines a six-step process for planning, developing, promoting, and distributing messages and materials for youth about alcohol: (1) planning and strategy development; (2) concept development; (3) message execution; (4) promotion and distribution; (5) evaluation; and (6) feedback. Appendices contain peer resistance strategies for saying no, a list of resource groups, and a 40-item bibliography. (NB)

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Methods, Messages, & Materials

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Public Health Service
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Communicating With Youth About Alcohol:

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S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service
Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
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Preface

Since the early 1980s the percentage of teenagers who drink and then drive has decreased. This may be one indication that the highly visible efforts of many groups to educate youth to the dangers of drinking and driving are working. Nevertheless, alcohol consumption by adolescents remains at alarmingly high levels. *Communicating With Youth About Alcohol: Methods, Messages, and Materials* is intended to spur additional and broader efforts to reach youth with the message that a healthy, productive adolescence is free of alcohol.

Despite the fact that in virtually all States the sale of alcohol to minors is illegal, many American adolescents have tried alcoholic beverages. In a recent nationwide study of class of 1984 high school seniors, it was found that 93 percent had used alcohol. The vast majority of seniors (approximately 86 percent) have had a drink in the past year, and more than two-thirds (approximately 67 percent) have had a drink in the past month. Most disturbing, however, is that 39 percent are engaged in heavy drinking (5 or more drinks per occasion) every 2 weeks. In addition, only 42 percent of high school seniors perceive great risk associated with this level of intoxication, and more students now report drinking to solve problems.

Reaching young people before they are in imminent danger of developing alcohol-related problems is a priority of the 1980s for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). It is hoped that this publication will increase the efforts of programs at the local, State, county, and city levels:

- to offset or delay experimentation with alcohol or other substances;
- to promote the acceptability of being a nondrinker;
- to encourage health-enhancing behavior;
- to improve willingness and the ability to "say no" to alcohol and other drugs.

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Contents

Introduction 2

Chapter 1

Understanding Youth and Alcohol 4

- *Adolescence* 4
- *Alcohol and Adolescent Social Structure* 5
- *Risks Associated With Teenage Alcohol Use* 6
- *Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Adolescents About Alcohol* 7

Chapter 2

Identifying the Message and Reaching the Audience 10

- *Interpersonal Communication* 11
- *What To Tell Youth* 11
- *Target Audience* 12
- *Communication Channels* 14
- *Message Appeal* 15

Chapter 3

A Framework for Planning, Developing, and Promoting Messages and Materials for Youth 18

- *Planning and Strategy Development—Stage 1* 19
- *Concept Development—Stage 2* 20
- *Message Execution—Stage 3* 21
- *Promotion and Distribution—Stage 4* 22
- *Evaluation—Stage 5* 23
- *Feedback—Stage 6* 24

Appendix 1

"Saying No": Peer Resistance Strategies 25

Appendix 2

Resource Groups 27

Bibliography 29

Introduction

ource: National Institute on Drug Abuse. Use of Licit and Illicit Drugs by America's High School Students 1975-1984 Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., and Bachman, J.G. DHHS Pub. o. (ADM)85-1394 Washington, DC: Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1985.

This publication is intended to provide direction to volunteers and professionals working to reduce teenage alcohol abuse through public education efforts. It should help those who want to educate young people about the risks associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs and how to avoid them. It is based on the belief that all alcohol prevention efforts aimed at youth must include an understanding of the complex needs and perceptions that young people have. To increase this understanding, *Communicating With Youth About Alcohol* includes the latest research on the alcohol-related knowledge, attitudes, and practices of youth. It also provides information on motivating adolescents to avoid alcohol or, if they have experimented, stop or avoid regular use.

This booklet offers ways to plan and develop messages and materials about alcohol so that adolescents will respond favorably. Whatever the approach chosen — posters, flyers, radio and television public service announcements (PSAs), puppet shows, bumper stickers, films, billboards — the process of development is virtually the same. The fundamental principle is to stay attuned to the target audience. By following the guidelines in this publication, communities, States, youth organizations, and other groups can change the misperceptions that young people have about alcohol.

Information alone may not be sufficient to deter adolescents from alcohol and other drug use and may in some cases actually increase initial curiosity and

experimentation. Moreover, the establishment of long-term behavior patterns generally cannot be brought about solely through public education efforts without an environment that is supportive of adolescents. Ideally, information should be available in every community that will offer opportunities for adolescents to discuss how they feel, learn facts about alcohol, get involved in creative activities, learn coping skills, and enhance their self-esteem. Program planners engaged in educating youth about alcohol are encouraged to learn about the resources in their area so they can refer young people who need help with their decision not to drink or use other drugs.

Chapter 1 presents current research findings on adolescent alcohol use, attitudes, and knowledge. Also discussed are some of the reasons why adolescents use alcohol and the risks associated with its use. With this, as well as specific information about the local adolescent population, program planners will have considerable resources to advocate abstinence from alcohol effectively.

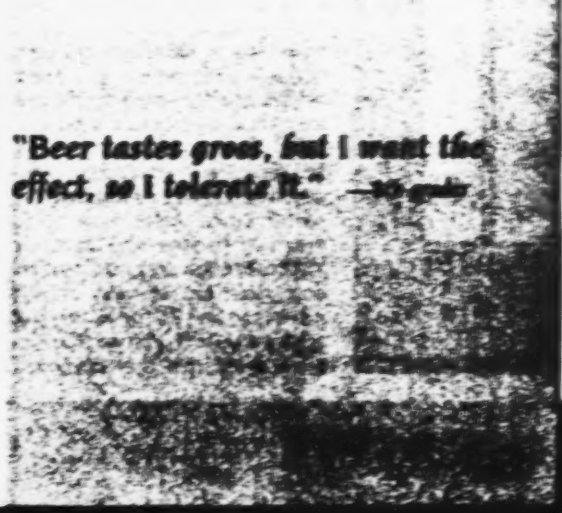
In chapter 2, communication strategies that have proved effective in educating and motivating youth to avoid alcohol and other drugs are described. Included are recommendations on selecting target groups, media, and message content. This chapter also provides some basic do's and don'ts for disseminating information to youth. This information is, of course, intended to stimulate innovative ideas, not to prescribe one particular course of action.

Chapter 3 outlines a six-step process for planning, developing, promoting, and distributing messages and materials for youth about alcohol. This planning framework is included to help reduce some of the uncertainty and cost of producing materials. Information about youth and alcohol is sometimes controversial, always complex, and often subject to change as new research findings are released. The following six steps described in chapter 3 can help program planners avoid misdirecting or alienating youth with inappropriate messages: planning and strategy development, concept development, message execution, promotion and distribution, evaluation, and feedback.

Alcohol and Adolescent Social Structure

The use of alcohol and other drugs may be part of a general pattern of behaviors and can sometimes be predicted by observing previous patterns and exposures. The following are some of the most recent research findings on adolescent social structure and behavior related to alcohol:

- Peer group acceptance is important to teenagers. Alcohol use is sometimes a prerequisite for acceptance into and participation in a group.
- Alcohol is used by some adolescents in the "weaning process," as they gain independence from parents. Alcohol use in this case may be seen as an act of defiance, nonconformity, or rebellion.
- Experimentation with alcohol, drugs, and smoking is often seen in Western societies as a symbolic rite of passage into adulthood. Many teens use alcohol and other drugs out of curiosity.
- Teens who drink often exhibit other antisocial behavior, skip classes, possess a low sense of self-esteem, and suffer from a sense of alienation.
- Alcohol is frequently used by teens in an attempt to cope with frustration and anger and to relieve anxieties.
- The earlier the age of initiation into drug use, the greater the probability of extensive and persistent involvement in the use of more dangerous drugs.
- Teen alcohol users lack a strong sense of positive involvement and attachment in their family relationships. Effective family functioning and parental family management can discourage youths' initiation into drug use.



quency, crime, violence, or promiscuity.

Explanations concerning alcohol use by young people range from deviance or rebellion to behavior that is performed in response to peer pressure, for self-medication, or as imitation of adult behavior. Current research tends to support the explanation that drinking by teenagers is often a way of coping with the many changes they are experiencing. The number of teens reporting that they drink to get away from problems and deal with frustration and anger has been steadily rising.

Problems and difficulties in any one aspect of their lives — physical, intellectual, emotional, interpersonal, sociopolitical, creative, spiritual — may lead adolescents to misuse alcohol and other drugs. Such behavior can have a serious effect on psychosocial development because he/she has found a way to avoid coming to terms with normal life problems and challenges. In fact, the drive to develop specific skills, abilities, and emotional stability essential for mature adult development may be inhibited by the use of alcohol or other drugs.

Understanding Youth and Alcohol

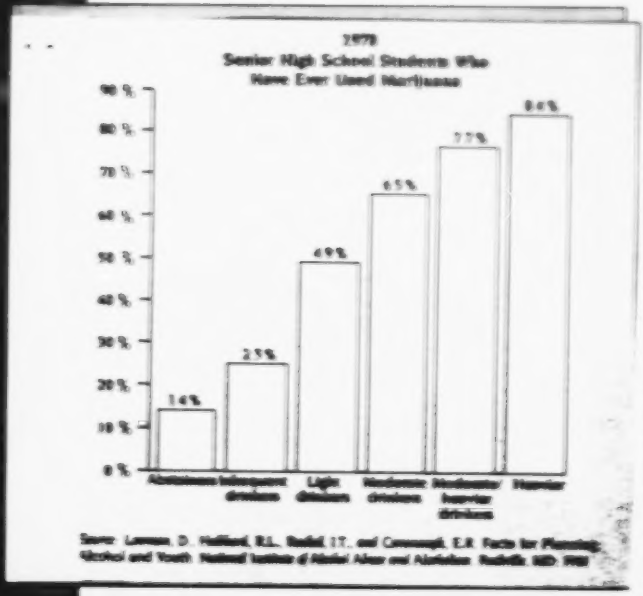
A teenager's choice of whether to drink or not results from a complicated mix of feelings and values arising from personal and social factors. In any case, alcohol use can have serious effects on an adolescent's ability to develop coping skills. To reach youth with information about the risks associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs, special attention must be given to understanding their many dimensions and characteristics, including their alcohol-related knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Fortunately, research is plentiful on adolescent development and on alcohol and other drug use, as well as on trends in the use of and attitudes toward alcohol and other drugs. This chapter summarizes some of the most recent findings about adolescents and their patterns of alcohol use and abuse.

"Physical growth, sexual development, changes in school environment and peer grouping are all issues of concern to most adolescents and they may produce feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, confusion, and tension . . . There is considerable pressure on young people to succeed at school, in athletics, and in social relations. When individuals do not live up to their own, parental, or peer expectations, they may experience a sense of failure and demoralization as well as feelings of anxiety and despair. Feelings of insecurity, sadness, and depression can accompany the leaving of a familiar and secure role in the family and taking on an unfamiliar, undefined role with greater responsibilities. Many young people do not have the inner resources or the external supports to cope with these distressing feelings and turn to alcohol and other drugs for relief." —Turanski

Adolescence

Adolescence — age 12 through 18 years — is a stage of development most baffling to teens themselves, their parents, and those who work with youth such as teachers, counselors, and youth service workers. Adolescents are experiencing physiological and psychological changes that include physical and conceptual maturation, a need for peer-group membership, and experimentation with heterosexual relationships. Many teenagers look outside themselves to find support or a coping mechanism to aid them in meeting these developmental stresses. Unfortunately, some youth turn to alcohol and/or drugs and, tragically, many also turn to suicide, delin-

"For younger kids, it's a challenge to see if they can get it, handle it, and fit in with it." —*high school senior*



Source: Lemmens, D., Hubbard, R.L., Rachal, J.T., and Cavanaugh, E.R. Facts for Planning: Alcohol and Youth. National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Rockville, MD: 1980

Risks Associated With Teenage Alcohol Use

Recent data indicate that those high school seniors who use alcohol also are more likely to approve its use, downplay its risks, and report their own parents and friends as being at least somewhat more accepting of its use than non-using seniors.

Heavy party drinking practices illustrate how adolescents tend to greatly underestimate the risks associated with their use of alcohol. While only 60 percent disapprove of having five or more drinks once or twice a weekend, 73 percent disapprove of having one or two drinks daily. This is in spite of the fact they associate greater risk with weekend heavy party drinking (42 percent) than with daily drinking (23 percent). These apparently inconsistent findings may be explained by the fact that a greater proportion of this age group are themselves heavy party drinkers (39 percent) than daily drinkers (5 percent).

The pervasive practice of heavy party drinking has remained at the same alarmingly high level since 1979 (a slight decrease occurred from 1983 to 1984) and has been linked with such problem behaviors as impaired driving performance, aggression and violence, disturbed interpersonal relationships, destruction of property, and impaired school or job performance. Also, more often than not, persons who are using alcohol or other drugs are multiple drug users. For example, in 1978 more than half of the senior high school students who were heavier drinkers reported they used mari-

juana at least once a week, compared with only 3 percent of alcohol abstainers who did so.

Although adverse consequences and risks are generally more likely for teenage drinkers who drink heavily either over a long period of time or on a weekend, no data are available on what quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption interferes with adolescent development. Given the lack of information on safe amounts of alcohol and the risks associated with alcohol use, encouraging adolescents with positive appeals not to drink appears to be the most appropriate message. Studies have shown that remaining an abstainer may greatly decrease the likelihood that an adolescent will engage in any problem behavior, whereas beginning to drink greatly increases the probability that the adolescent will become involved in a variety of problem behaviors.

Most teenagers will not be persuaded to abstain from using alcohol solely because of information about the risks associated with it. However, program planners may wish to review the following summary of risks associated with teenage alcohol use. In comparison with nondrinking youth:

- They have a greater chance of not learning many of the emotional and social skills necessary for a healthy and safe life.
- They have a greater chance of becoming involved with other drugs and engaging in problematic behavior such as truancy, vandalism, petty theft, and property damage.
- They have a greater chance of causing an accident or injury to self and others.
- They begin experimenting with alcohol at an early age and have a greater chance of becoming heavy drinkers during their middle and late teens.
- They have a greater chance of getting into trouble with parents, friends, and teachers; and
- They have a greater chance of using other drugs such as cigarettes and marijuana.

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Adolescents About Alcohol

Recent data about the alcohol-related perceptions and practices of youth are highlighted throughout this chapter. The principal source of information is *Use of Licit and Illicit Drugs by American High School Students 1975-1984* published by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Lack of knowledge about the health, social, and legal risks associated with alcohol consumption is obviously not the only reason why adolescents use and abuse alcohol and other drugs. However, lack of knowledge about alcohol is at least partly responsible for alcohol-related behavior. Frequently, more knowledge will lead to a change in attitudes and may lead to change in behavior, if supplemented by instruction in interpersonal communication techniques that will help teens say no to alcohol. Of course, behavior change may be motivated by other methods, in addition to public education, such as changing the minimum purchase age or increasing the penalty for drunk driving.

Knowledge

- About 50 percent of teens do not know that automobile accidents are the leading cause of death among teenagers.
- One in three teens thinks that some people can drive safely after drinking.
- Very few high school seniors think there is much risk in using marijuana experimentally (15 percent) or even occasionally (23 percent). Sixty-seven percent consider regular use of marijuana to involve great risk.

"They (parents) would probably take the car away. I'm too old to be spanked or grounded."

—high school senior

- Only 23 percent of high school seniors associate much risk of harm with having one or two drinks daily and 42 percent believe five or more drinks once or twice each weekend is harmful. About 68 percent think four or five drinks daily are harmful.
- Nearly 30 percent of high school seniors say that most or all of their friends get drunk at least once a week.
- Most adolescent substance users are unaware or unconcerned about the dependency that may result from the frequent use of tobacco, alcohol, and certain drugs, and they tend to overestimate their ability to avoid personally destructive patterns of use.

Attitudes

- About one-third of students in grades four to eight believe that drinking alcohol is a "big problem" among kids their age, and about 40 percent say the same about drugs.
- Over recent years, disapproval for cigarette smoking has been increasing modestly (from 66 percent in 1976 to 71 percent in 1980). It has remained fairly stable since then.
- Substantial majorities of teenagers understand that regular use of alcohol or drugs during the teen years is not a phase but a problem that may carry over to adult life.
- About 50 percent of 15-year-olds say they would "just say no" if offered drugs by friends.
- Fully 41 percent believe that cigarette smoking in public places should be prohibited by law — a higher percentage think getting drunk in such places should be prohibited (52 percent).
- Sixty percent of high school seniors disapprove of heavy drinking on weekends.
- About 60 percent of 15-year-olds reported they felt comfortable talking to their parents about drugs.
- Many teenagers think that teenage drinking would decrease if parents supervised parties more closely and if parents didn't drink so much.

Practices

- Fifty-nine percent of high school seniors say they are often around people using alcohol to get high.
- About 50 percent of 15-year-olds reported having ever used drugs.
- Sixteen percent of high school seniors have used cocaine at least once. It is quite common for cocaine users to consume large amounts of alcohol, since they say it diminishes the anxiety and the depression associated with the temporary cessation of heavy cocaine use.
- Thirty-nine percent of high school seniors say they had taken five or more drinks in a row at least once during the previous two weeks.

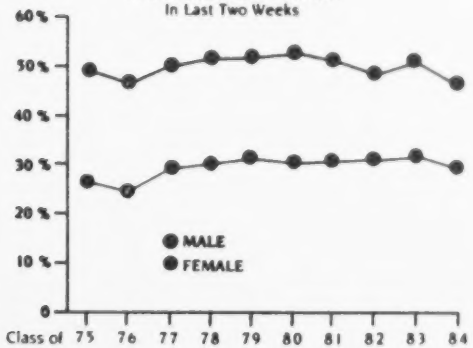
- Males are twice as likely as females to drive drunk.
- When black and white youth are compared, black youth have lower rates of alcohol use. There is a rise in the number of black youth who use alcohol after high school.
- Nearly all high school seniors (93 percent) had tried alcohol at some time and the great majority (67 percent) had used it in the previous month.
- With increasing age, there is increased exposure to settings, such as parties, in which alcohol is present and consumed.
- Fifty-five percent of high school seniors reported some use of marijuana in the previous year.
- Four in 10 teens between 13 and 15 have at some time been a passenger in a car driven by someone about their own age who was under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Nineteen percent of high school seniors smoke cigarettes daily. Fewer males than females are regular smokers.
- In 1983, 16-to-24 year olds represented only 20 percent of the population, but they constituted 34 percent of the drivers killed in alcohol-related accidents.
- Fifty-six percent of high school seniors had used alcohol before entering tenth grade.
- One year after New York raised its minimum purchase age for alcoholic beverages from 18 to 19, there was a 21 percent decrease in fatal and injury crashes among 18-year-olds and a 47 percent decrease in the number of people in this age group who reported drinking and driving. Marijuana use and driving while feeling the effects of marijuana decreased slightly, similar to the national trend of decreased usage.

"Some people use drugs or alcohol because there's nothing to do, they're just bored. Some do it when they're mad, like if they're arguing with their parents."

—high school senior peer counselor

Trends in Two-Week Prevalence of Heavy Drinking by Sex

Five Or More Drinks In A Row In Last Two Weeks



Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse. Use of Licit and Illicit Drugs by America's High School Students 1975-1984. Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., and Bachman, J.G. DHHS Pub No. (ADM) 85-1394. Washington, DC: Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1985.

Identifying the Message and Reaching the Audience

"My parents have had a very strong influence on my life. They have made it clear that drug and alcohol use is wrong and unacceptable and have strongly backed my decision not to use."

—high school senior

Helping young people to avoid the use of alcohol or, if they have experimented, helping them to avoid regular use is a difficult challenge. Experience in many communities has shown that public education efforts can influence knowledge and attitudes about alcohol-related problems. Such efforts include radio and television public service announcements (PSAs), posters, billboards, transit advertising, bumper stickers, booklets, T-shirts, films, videos, bookmarks, and anything else that effectively transmits a prevention message. These methods are generally more useful for creating awareness than for altering established behaviors or for discouraging behaviors prevalent in adolescent social settings. Such public awareness, however, is a necessary antecedent to attitude and behavior change.

Information dissemination takes careful planning. How the message is presented influences whether it is accepted and remembered. Other messages are reaching youth that associate the use of alcohol with glamour, sophistication, and festive occasions. The potential is high for misdirecting or alienating target audiences with inappropriate messages. For instance, research has shown that scare tactics and moralistic overtones tend to "turn off" adolescents.

This chapter provides specific strategies for incorporating the information about youth described in chapter 1. However, it should be remembered that the characteristics of youth and their alcohol-related behavior vary to some

What To Tell Youth

The following suggestions provide a starting point around which public information messages and materials about alcohol for youth could be developed. Each broad message is followed by key points that might provide ideas for messages that meet the objectives of your program.

Communicate: Choosing not to drink alcohol or take drugs is a sign of maturity.

- Promote the idea that deciding not to drink or take drugs is the more mature thing to do.
- Depict specific social coping skills which are considered mature by peers and adults.

Communicate: Alcohol doesn't help in coping with "real-life" situations.

- Stress that avoiding alcohol will increase the likelihood that the teen will be successful in school.
- Demonstrate how using alcohol may interfere with the ability to develop appropriate social skills, such as asking for a date.
- Provide creative solutions and activities for coping with anxiety.

Communicate: Good friends respect your right to be you.

- Emphasize that being oneself is important.
- Stress the ideas of self-control, self-esteem, and self-assertiveness.
- Develop the adolescent's personal and social coping skills for resisting peer pressure and other pressures to use alcohol and other drugs.

Communicate: Not everyone drinks.

- Dissuade teens from the widely held belief that "everyone" is drinking.
- Illustrate acceptability of use of nonalcoholic beverages by adults to counter the glamorous image purveyed by media of use of alcoholic beverages.

Communicate: Be alcohol-free and stay hassle-free.

- Help clarify for youth the extent to which they risk getting in trouble if they violate the law.
- Suggest a good way to get parents to give family car privileges is to stay away from alcohol.
- Getting into trouble with the law, school, and parents is disapproved and considered stupid by most teens.

Communicate: You are not a bad person because you drink.

- Help youth feel comfortable seeking help if alcohol is a problem for them or for someone in their immediate family.

Communicate: Stay alive, don't drink and drive.

- Demonstrate how young people can feel comfortable refusing to drink and drive or ride with someone whose driving performance is impaired.
- Acknowledge that being in control is extremely important to teens.

degree — in each particular school region, State, community. A closer look should be taken at the socioeconomic status of the target group and the environment in which they go to school, live and play. Such efforts will increase the likelihood that messages will be understood, relevant, and acceptable.

Interpersonal Communication

Lasting change in the behavior of youth will probably not be achieved without interpersonal communication, including group discussions about how to avoid alcohol and other drugs and positive reinforcement of abstinence. Some alcohol abuse prevention programs help teens to deal with life's pressures through training in assertiveness, communication with peers and adults, stress reduction, social coping skills, and general confidence building (see Appendix II). However, when resources are unavailable for beginning such a comprehensive approach, efforts should be made to tap existing community services and programs so that reinforcement is as comprehensive as possible. Teenagers may acquire the attitudes that promote and reinforce abstinence through involvement with such programs as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCA, YWCA, Big Brother, Big Sister, Camp Fire Girls, Boys Clubs of America, etc. In many communities, counseling services are available for teens at high risk and those exhibiting problem behaviors. An inventory of relevant resources should be compiled to

"Television shows people getting drunk when something bad has happened to them."

—10th grader

Message Development Guidelines

- Repeat the main ideas frequently.
- Recommend performing specific behaviors.
- Demonstrate the health problem, behavior, or skills — if appropriate.
- Provide new, accurate, and complete information.
- Use a slogan or theme.
- Be sure that the person presenting the message is seen as a credible source of information.
- Select a testimonial, demonstration, or slice-of-life format.
- Present the facts in a straightforward manner.
- Use positive rather than negative appeals.
- Use humor, if appropriate, but pretest the material to be sure it does not offend the intended audience.
- Be sure your message is relevant to your target audience.
- Describe risk factors that the teen can control.

answer the demand for alternatives that generally emerges once prevention messages reach youth.

Teens are often very willing to get involved with programs aimed at reducing alcohol and other drug use and abuse among their peers. This gives them the opportunity to participate in a worthwhile activity while learning about and exploring alcohol issues, attitudes, and values. With their enthusiasm, spontaneity, and openness they can lend valuable creativity to the development of effective prevention approaches. However, many young people will need time and encouragement if they are to assume an active, assertive, and responsible role. The opinions of teens should be respected so that their involvement will be a positive experience for all involved.

Target Audience

Based on the review of current data and an assessment of the service area population, program planners must decide which segments of their youth audience they want to address. Important information about alcohol use by adolescents in a particular community can be obtained from the juvenile probation department, sheriff's office, district attorney's office, public health department, and drinking/driving programs. Such information will enable planners to allocate resources to the groups with the greatest needs and also to design materials that best meet the needs of each particular group.

A key factor in delineating each target group is the group's level of readiness to act — to use or not

use alcohol. Selection of youth target audiences is also based on factors such as degree of risk for alcohol experimentation, lack of knowledge about alcohol, or poor attitudes and practices related to drinking. The following are three sample youth target groups.

Youth of legal driving age: This group is at high risk for alcohol-related death and injury. Messages developed for them must address the dangers of drinking and driving: the teenage perception of immortality, the potential for losing control, and compromising status with parents, the law, and school. (Care should be taken to avoid a message that suggests drinking is all right if driving is not involved.)

Youth approaching driving age, 14 to 15 years old: This group is anticipating the privilege of having a driver's license. They may be associating with older teenagers who are experimenting with alcohol and other drugs together with driving. It is important to encourage this age group to adopt a conservative attitude toward substance use so that they are able to refuse offers of alcohol or drugs and to refuse rides with impaired drivers.

High-risk youth: These youth have been identified as children of alcohol abusers and alcoholics, children with problems at home and/or school, children seen by juvenile justice workers for delinquency problems, military dependents (and others in highly mobile families), and youth in institutional settings. These groups have a greater probability of being involved with alcohol than other youth. Materials directed toward this group should be focused on the benefits and rewards of positive relationships with peers and family and good performance at school. Strategies for coping with life's pressures and real-life situations are important for members of this group, who need alternatives to alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol and other drug use is sometimes a part of being accepted by peers and for some peer groups is a prerequisite for membership. Teenagers often con-

Communicate: There are many positive aspects of drinking something besides alcohol.

- Illustrate alcohol-related behavior that may make the teen look foolish in the eyes of their peers.
- Reinforce the attitude that expressing and acting on one's feeling is respected behavior.
- Describe the effects of alcohol that interfere with athletic performance, such as reduced stamina and strength.

Communicate: There are many constructive opportunities to experience life.

- Recommend creative outlets that use the special talents and expertise of young people.
- Suggest opportunities for more involvement with family, school, and community.

Communicate: If you drink something besides alcohol. . .

. . . You can count on not making a fool out of yourself on your first, second, or hundredth date.

. . . You can count on your parents being more agreeable about lending you the car.

. . . You can count on making a good impression on the people that matter to you.

. . . You can count on staying out of trouble with the law, teachers, and your parents.

. . . You can count on your real friends accepting you as you are.

. . . You can count on being in control. . .

"Fear of punishment is no good because we don't believe we'll get caught."

—8th grader

sider themselves members of distinct groups such as jocks, preppies, and so on. The degree, context, and style in which alcohol is used may vary considerably among these groups. Program planners should be alert to the types of local groups and attempt to reach them by carefully selecting a spokesperson and focusing the language and content of the message. This is particularly important in an environment in which such groups may possess contrasting and sometimes hostile values, attitudes, and leisure time activities.

Communication Channels

Selection of the medium, or communication channel, through which the message about alcohol will reach the target audience should be based on a determination of which channels are seen as most credible and will expose teens to the message as frequently as possible. Research shows, for example, that the typical American child will spend more time watching television than he or she will spend at any other single activity, including going to school or interacting with friends. In general, the time spent watching television peaks at age 12 and declines by 10 percent by age 18.

Although television is the most influential media, the cost is often prohibitive. As young people taper off their TV viewing in their late teens, they increase use of other media, particularly magazines, radio, newspapers, movies, and records. Radio, for instance, reaches 88 percent of the teenage population on an average day.

They listen to more than 3 hours each day, most frequently during the evening and right after school. Boys generally prefer hard rock stations while girls choose soft rock music.

In general, when the message is rather simple, radio and television are the most persuasive. When the message is fairly complex, comprehension and persuasion are better achieved through print. Campaigns that combine many approaches are recommended to assure repeated exposure and to maximize the effect.

Teenagers in a Michigan study ranked a variety of sources of information for learning about drunk driving, types of alcohol, characteristics of drinkers, and alcohol problems. The following sources were ranked in order of their importance:

- TV Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Parents
- Friends
- News stories
- Books and pamphlets
- TV program portrayals
- Teachers
- Own experience
- TV beer ads
- Doctors
- Radio PSAs
- Magazine liquor ads
- Siblings
- Songs on radio and records

Always consider how teenagers receive information apart from the mass media. Many adolescents have regular contact with local churches, schools, recreation centers, or youth organizations that may be interested in collaborative efforts or serve as points of distribution for materials aimed at youth. Informal meeting places or hangouts, however, may provide the only point of contact with some young people who have no formal affiliations. They may be found at the drugstore near a magazine rack or a pinball machine, at a suburban shopping mall, at bowling alleys, beaches, and in many other settings. Messages and materials that reflect this lifestyle placed in appropriate locations will increase the likelihood that all segments of the youth population are served.

Whatever medium is selected, it is important to remember that exposure to messages does not occur in a vacuum; other media may be supporting or countering campaign themes. Television, magazines, music, and movies relay many messages about drugs and alcohol to adolescents. They may imply that getting drunk is fun or a way to handle depression, or they may describe the tragic consequences of drug and alcohol use. Advertisements try to interest the audience in alcohol through sex appeal, power symbols, excitement, and fantasies that have no direct relation to the actual product.

Message Appeal

To have a positive impact, the format and content of all materials must appeal fundamentally to youth. Many public information materials and messages are dull or too complex. More exciting, dramatic, humorous, engaging, and understandable styles make the message appealing. Also, audiences tend to trust spokespersons who are esteemed or who are

"You can't get serious with someone who is drunk."

—8th grader

similar in language, in values, and in personal and social characteristics. Teenagers tend to prefer characters who treat them with respect and refrain from judging their behavior. The techniques for conveying a message that have worked well for commercial advertisers are:

- Problem solution — stating the problem and the solution.
- Humor.
- Unusual characters — personalities or celebrities who become identified with the message.
- Slice-of-life enactments in which a doubter is converted, and
- Candid camera testimonials.

Adolescents are quick to discern and reject a judgmental tone emanating from adults or peers. Teens are very concerned about their social interactions and relationships; they do not want to look "stupid" or lose control in front of their peers. Girls do not want to take responsibility for reproaching the behavior of boys, and boys do not accept other teens telling them what to do. Teens generally tend to reject any message in which one peer is judging the behavior of another. Therefore, a public service announcement (PSA) showing a young person judging his or her own behavior — smashing the family car as "stupid" — is more effective than someone else making remarks about such behavior.

Teenagers describe their peers who frequently get drunk as foolish, irresponsible, rude, loud, immature, and obnoxious. Positive characteristics — with the exception of humorous and popular — are seldom linked to the drunk. The drunk teen is not seen as mature.

sophisticated, respected, in control, or confident. The need to remain sober to drive and to avoid trouble are frequently cited as acceptable excuses for not drinking.

Teenage boys tend to place a great deal of value on outstanding athletic performance. They value being masculine and they will respond to messages that provide a masculine-related reason for not drinking, such as reduced stamina and strength. However, since some teens feel as if they are performing better under the influence of alcohol, messages must reinforce the reality that performance is improved if one does not drink.

Messages that stress positive benefits, give a sense of control, and decrease anxiety and fear by providing specific methods for positive action will be most appealing to youth. Arousing fear through scare tactics, such as gruesome car accidents, are counterproductive because teenagers believe they are too young to be seriously injured, die in an automobile accident, or drown.

It is extremely important to use jargon familiar to the target audience. For instance, adults may prefer intoxicated, inebriated, or drunk, but many teens currently use "buzzed," "bombed," or "wasted" and they make clear distinctions between them. Since the terms in vogue change so regularly, interaction with teenagers will keep the language current.

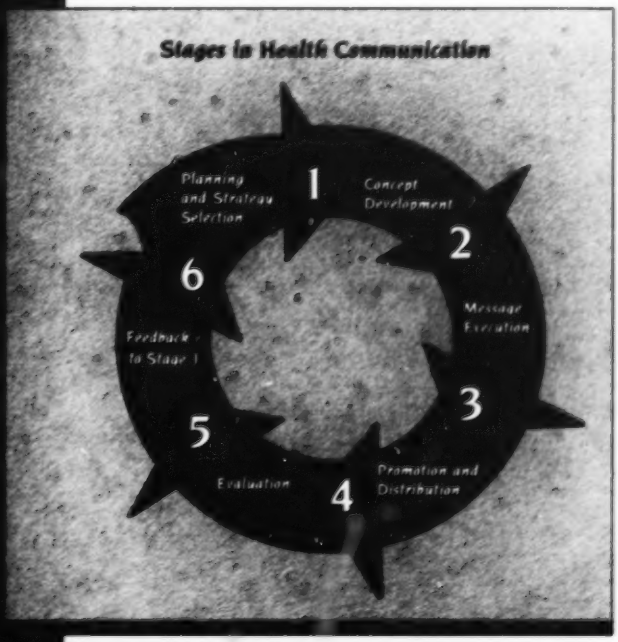
Guidelines to follow in developing messages and materials for youth are:

The message must be credible. It must reflect the values, beliefs, and feelings of the target audience. Teenagers don't want to lose control or otherwise lose face. In fact, boys believe that refusing to ride with a drinking driver and disqualifying oneself from driving after drinking are responsible behaviors and will gain the respect of one's peers.

The message must be eye-catching. It must hold the teenager's attention and be sophisticated as well. Whenever possible, the direct message should use the current colloquialisms of the target audience. By the same token, the message will have more of an impact if it reflects the teenagers' analysis of a situation. Teenagers report that "you can maintain control if you don't drink," meaning that then you won't look stupid, get sick, be unable to drive, make a fool out of yourself, become violent, or be sexually vulnerable.

The message must motivate. To get teens to take action, the message must be transmitted by a character that the target audience likes. Teenagers say they like characters who treat teens with respect and who do not judge. Teens seem to be motivated if the message presents one simple, positive, clear message that suggests some immediate rewards. Demonstrations of specific behaviors and skills, such as tactics for saying no, may contribute to a positive audience response.

A Framework for Planning, Developing, and Promoting Messages and Materials for Youth



To help ensure that program planners allocate time and other resources efficiently in developing messages and materials for youth, a six-stage communications process has been developed. This approach has been used by many health agencies, including the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Office of Cancer Communications, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). It does not require extensive resources and may easily be adapted by volunteers at the local level or by those at the State or national level concerned about the youth alcohol problem.

The fundamental premise of this process is that health communications should be based on an understanding of the needs and perceptions of the target audience. It is designed to allow for variations in environments and to maximize opportunities for creativity. Many possibilities exist for reaching youth with information about alcohol.

This process can be used by program planners developing alcohol-related materials such as pamphlets, posters, flyers, newspaper advertisements, television and radio PSAs, broadcast programs, films, and slide shows. Although in many cases the program will have decided on the type(s) of materials to be developed before undertaking the planning process, new ideas may be generated during the message and materials development stages. In fact, it may be decided that the most effective way to reach youth is through materials

such as T-shirts, minidramas, comic books, bumper stickers, etc. Combining several of these materials into kits with a central theme is recommended as a comprehensive method for attracting the attention of young people.

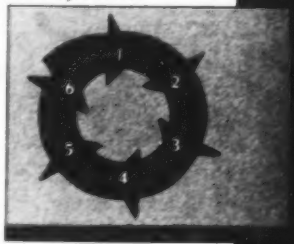
The steps outlined below constitute an ideal process, one that may require more time and money than many agencies can afford. Adapting materials that others have developed, with their permission and/or cooperation, is one way of shortening the route. Before devoting time, energy, and other resources to developing materials from scratch, check with other organizations to determine what they are doing. Besides avoiding duplication of efforts, these contacts may lead to joint projects with shared resources and information. These groups can also help get information to their members by printing articles in their newsletters or distributing printed materials. Or perhaps other groups will be interested in distributing materials, thereby expanding the audience reached.

Many State and national organizations have developed packets of materials aimed at youth. These packets have included press releases, booklets, public service announcements, and other materials that can be adapted for local use. Some of the groups you may wish to call are:

- Local affiliates of voluntary national organizations such as the National Council on Alcoholism.
- County and State mental health and social service departments.
- Statewide councils on alcohol and drug abuse.
- Special organizations for youth; and
- National voluntary groups with the family, for example, the National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth or the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA).

Some of the steps described below may not be feasible; others may not be essential. However, all planners developing messages and materials should write a concise communications strategy that includes writing program objectives, defining target audiences, identifying the needs and perceptions of each target audience, what actions they should take, the reasons why they should act, and the benefits to be gained.

1 *Planning and Strategy Development*



During this initial stage, target audiences and communication strategies are selected. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on these topics. A more indepth analysis would entail reading other literature, new articles, academic journals, and reports such as those cited in the reference list. Many communities may have access to specific data about the characteristics of youth in their community that will be helpful in formulating a strategy. Such information may be available through the local or State health planning agencies, mental health agencies, and other community service programs. Contacting the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol Information (or Drug Abuse Information) may also be a worthwhile first step. (See resource list.)

The more data gathered and analyzed, the more complete the profile of the target audience. In some cases, program planners may choose to conduct research that involves direct contact with individuals representing the target audience. This could include interviews with a small sample of teenagers, a small-scale telephone survey, or a household survey of a random sample of teens. Program budgets and timetables will dictate what is feasible.

From the information collected and analyzed, program planners can formulate a communications strategy. The communication stategy is a statement of the program objectives, the primary and secondary target audiences to be reached, and the benefits and other information that must be communicated. The strategy should also include general specifications, including format and length, to provide direction for the development of specific messages and materials.

2 *Concept Development*

Based on the planning accomplished in stage 1, message concepts are developed in stage 2. These concepts may consist of rough art work (a line drawing or sketch) or statements consisting of words or phrases to convey the main idea and the source of the message. Involving the target audience early can provide direction for eliminating weaker approaches and for identifying effective message concepts.

Developing message concepts involves considering several issues, as discussed in chapter 2.

- What type of message format should be used? A testimonial from a celebrity or a person typical of the target audience, a slice-of-life, or a vignette?
- What type of spokesperson should be used to convey the message? A member of the target audience, an authority figure, male or female, a couple, a group, or an individual?
- What is the appeal — emotional, logical, or humorous?

One method of assessing concepts is to pretest them. Pretesting is a way to gather target audience reactions. The information learned leads to improvements in concept messages and materials when revisions are still affordable. Pretesting is not foolproof, but it can help reduce some of the uncertainty and risk of producing materials that may be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Focus group research is a widely used method of pretesting, both at the concept stage and when the message or material is developed (See stage 3). Essentially, it is a type of qualitative research in which an experienced moderator leads about 8 to 10 respondents through a discussion of a selected topic, allowing them to talk freely and spontaneously. The assistance of the local advertising association, school system, and teen club or other youth activity group might be enlisted to recruit participants. The steps for organizing focus group research are as follows:

- Identify materials or concepts to be tested.
- Select a skilled group moderator to lead the discussion.

■ Develop a moderator's guide for the discussion that might include questions leading from a general focus to a narrow one to elicit group reactions on the issues, concepts, messages, or materials

■ Arrange for logistics such as room and recording equipment

■ Identify and recruit focus group participants from the target audience

■ Confirm attendance with participants before the session

■ Videotape or record the session if possible

■ Transcribe the tape and prepare a brief report for use in planning and revision

3 Message Execution

Once the concepts with the most potential have been selected, complete messages and materials can be created in appropriate formats for reaching teenagers. These messages and materials should be produced in rough form such as a radio announcement produced in a nonstudio setting with nonprofessional talent or a booklet using typewriter copy and a rough layout of the artwork as it might appear in the final form. At this stage, rather than generating more ideas and perceptions about concepts, pretesting should provide specific information about the following

■ Attention — Does the product attract and or hold the attention of teenagers?

■ Comprehension — Is the message clearly understood? Are the main ideas conveyed?

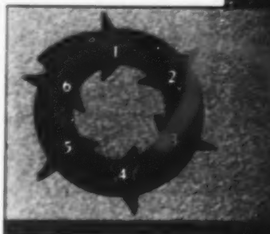
■ Personal Relevance — Does the target audience perceive the message to be personally relevant?

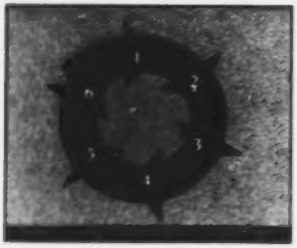
■ Believability — Is the message and or its source perceived as believable by teenagers?

■ Acceptability — Is there anything in the message that may be offensive or unacceptable to the target audience?

Other gauges of effectiveness may include assessing target audience perceptions about the information contained in an item, and the extent to which target audiences find messages or materials attractive, interesting, convincing, or alarming. Also, separate components of the item can be pretested such as the cover, illustrations for a booklet, characters in a film, and so on.

Testing methods at this stage might include focus groups, gatekeeper reviews by the key people who would distribute the product, or reviews by other experts. Many of the individuals involved in such pretesting may be willing to donate their services, especially if they are potential users of the materials.





4 Promotion and Distribution

During this stage, the product will be complete, produced, and distributed. The results of pretesting should be carefully examined to determine the necessary revisions. Typical areas where improvement might be needed are the following.

- If pretesting reveals that teenagers do not understand certain phrases or words, add definitions or find out if different words meaning the same thing are used by your audience. Colloquialisms are often more persuasive to teens.
- If the pretest indicates that youth do not understand or are confused by the message or materials, consider ways to simplify it. Take out anything extraneous and consider ways to repeat the main idea of the message throughout.
- If the audience is offended by the message or the way in which it is presented, consider ways to modify the message to make it more positive and acceptable.

Promoting and distributing materials is, of course, an essential facet of a successful communications campaign. Survey the community to determine the locations where teens tend to congregate and develop relationships with agencies that serve youth. Record stores, youth centers, diners, fast food restaurants, and movie theaters are just some of the locations frequented by youth. A program with extensive community involvement — volunteers, State authorities, the private sector, schools, political and government leaders, experts, and celebrities — is more likely to be successful in distribut-

ing materials to as many places as possible. Community businesses not directly involved will usually be pleased to assist by placing materials in their place of business.

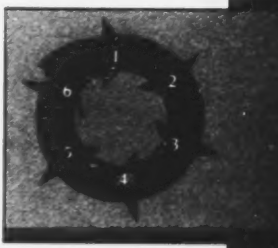
Although neither radio nor TV stations are required to donate a specific amount of time to PSAs, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) considers a station's public service performance — that is, the amount of time devoted to PSAs and programing of importance to the community — when deciding whether a license should be renewed. So both radio and TV stations are sometimes willing to donate public service time for the promotion of a mass information program. They may even be willing to contribute to the effort by recording some PSAs with prominent local personalities as narrators. In addition, consider working with TV and radio in the following ways:

- Write questions for a talk show interview and suggest community leaders, celebrities, or others who can speak knowledgeably about drug and alcohol problems among youth.
- Provide background information to radio and TV stations about alcohol and other drug-related knowledge, attitudes, and practices among youth.
- Plan to videotape special events and speeches made by major public figures addressing the problem.

Personal contact is the best approach to use in developing a positive relationship with persons who will display, feature, or air public information. Evidence shows, for example, that radio and TV public service directors will be more inclined to air a PSA if they have had contact with representatives from the sponsoring program.

Working with newspapers and magazines also requires personal contact. When possible, news releases should be written and submitted personally to the editor. Many magazine and newspaper editors are amenable to collaborative arrangements so that their writers are provided with fresh news stories, feature story ideas, and useful background statistics and information.

5 Evaluation



The purpose of evaluating a communications campaign is to determine if it has had the desired effect. That is, has it met its objectives? During this stage, the effectiveness of the distribution strategy as well as the receptivity of the target audience to the materials is evaluated. Merely measuring the number of pamphlets distributed, however, is much less indicative of effectiveness than measuring the outcome or effect of the materials. An informal telephone survey of persons who have requested the program's materials might provide some valuable information on its usefulness. Requesting comments by including an insert in publications, with a return address may elicit some feedback. A more formal quantitative survey will, of course, require ample program resources and a careful determination of whether any changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices are attributable to the program's efforts. Literature on eval-

uation research will be helpful and should be consulted early in the process of developing and distributing materials and messages.

The following are some key considerations pertinent to all evaulations:

- What was the degree of exposure of the target audiences?
- Did the target audiences recall the specific message?
- Did the target audiences accept or reject the messages as being relevant to them as individuals?
- To what extend were changes in target audience attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors attributable to the messages and materials?
- To what extent were changes in target audience intentions to take appropriate actions influenced?
- Did the effectiveness of the campaign vary according to the demographic characteristics of the audiences (sex, age, race, family income, and so on)?
- What was learned in the campaign about target audience characteristics and receptivity that would improve the messages and materials?
- What was learned in the campaign that could be used in planning future communication activities?

6 *Feedback*

In the sixth stage, all the information gathered through pretesting and other research, as well as evaluation, is analyzed in preparation of a new cycle of program messages and materials. The data should be examined carefully to uncover problems and identify weaknesses that can be remedied when planning later communication programs for youth about alcohol.

For example, the results of an evaluation of a poster intended to increase awareness of peer pressure might indicate that the target audience did not think the information realistic. The next cycle of messages might include a pamphlet to address this issue in more depth. Also, keeping in touch with organizations with similar concerns and activities will provide additional insights into effective methods for reaching youth with information about alcohol.

In conclusion, there are certain principles to follow consistently when developing a communications campaign, even when resources are limited:

- Time and effort should be devoted to developing a comprehensive campaign plan.
- Keeping abreast of the research literature on the target population and the use of mass media in health communication will provide direction for new approaches.
- Understanding the information needs and perceptions of youth and obtaining feedback from them — even if on a small-scale — are essential.
- Establishing good working relationships with concerned citizens in the community, the local media, and other relevant groups will improve the chance for success.

"Saying No": Peer Resistance Strategies

"Saying No" is a promising approach to prevention of alcohol and other drug abuse. It is designed to help young people resist pressure to use cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs. These "Saying No" programs draw on social-psychological theories that suggest that resistance to peer persuasion will be greater if young people have been able, in advance, to identify, understand, and practice reasons for not using alcohol and other drugs. Most "Saying No" programs incorporate three components: (1) strategies that increase young people's knowledge by providing information about alcohol and other drugs and their effects, peer pressure, and other influences to use drugs, (2) techniques for expanding their specific behavior repertoire for "saying no", and (3) training in life skills such as decisionmaking, coping with anxiety, and assertiveness.

The approach has been targeted at 6th, 7th, or 8th graders, often with booster programs in high school. In the classroom, these programs can be presented by live role modeling situations or videotaped role modeling, and with public commitments in front of other classmates not to smoke or use drugs. Health educators or teachers can present the curriculum units. Same-age peers or older peers can also be trained to introduce these concepts and materials. Although there is ongoing research on effective "Saying No" approaches, at this point it appears as though peers are more effective than teachers in presenting this approach to students.

Another drug education approach is "general skills development" rather than response skills to very specific stimuli such as cigarette smoking. This approach suggests that if students are able to learn general skills — such as how to be assertive, how to communicate more effectively with other young people, how to handle anxiety, how to learn self-improvement, and how to improve decisionmaking — they will be better prepared for dealing with life's pressures, including, but not limited to, dealing with alcohol and other drugs.

Although many of these approaches are promising and some have shown positive evaluation outcomes, research is ongoing to determine with whom and under what conditions these different approaches are effective, what components are effective, whether they will work in regular classroom situations, rather than under scientifically controlled settings, and whether teachers and peers can effectively transmit these approaches.

Attached is a list of some of the individuals involved in developing curricula for the various "Saying No" approaches. To inquire about these various curricula, we suggest your school's curriculum development specialist may wish to make direct contact with the researchers.

Individuals To Contact for Further Information About Peer Resistance Strategies

Gilbert J. Botvin, Ph.D.
Department of Pubic Health
Cornell University Medical College
411 East 69th St., Room 226
New York, NY 10021
(212) 472-5240

Richard I. Evans, Ph.D., Director
Social Psychology/Behavioral Medicine Research and Graduate Training Group
Department of Psychology
University of Houston, Central Campus
Houston, TX 77004
(713) 749-3152

Kelin Gersick, Ph.D.
The Consultation Center of the Connecticut Mental Health Center
Department of Psychiatry
Yale University School of Medicine
19 Howe Street
New Haven, CT 06511
(203) 789-7645

William Hansen, Ph.D./C. Anderson Johnson, Ph.D.
"Project SMART"
Health Behavior Research Institute
University of Southern California
1985 Zonal Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90033
(213) 224-7594

Alfred McAlister, Ph.D.
Center for Health Promotion Research and Development
University of Texas at Austin
2300 Main Building
Austin, TX 78712
(512) 471-5801

Cheryl L. Perry, Ph.D.
Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene
School of Public Health
University of Minnesota
611 Beacon St., SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612) 376-6966

Appendix B

Resource Groups

The following resource groups can provide additional information and/or assistance

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters
(includes Alateen for children or siblings of alcoholics, and Al-Anon Adult Children of Alcoholics groups)
P O Box 182
Madison Square Station
New York, NY 10159
(212) 683-1771

Alcoholics Anonymous
P O Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
(212) 686-1100

American Council for Drug Education
5820 Hubbard Drive
Rockville, MD 20852
(301) 984-5700

Boys Clubs of America
771 First Avenue
New York, NY 10017
(212) 557-7755

Center for Early Adolescence
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Suite 223
Carr Mill Mall
Carrboro, NC 27510
(919) 966-1148

Children of Alcoholics Foundation, Inc
540 Madison Avenue, 23rd Floor
New York, NY 10022
(212) 431-1366

Families in Action Drug Information Center
3845 North Druid Hills Road
Suite 300
Decatur, GA 30033
(404) 325-5799

Girls Clubs of America
205 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10016
(212) 689-3700

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
Central Office
669 Airport Freeway
Suite 310
Hurst, TX 76053
(817) 268-MADD

National Association for Children of Alcoholics
31706 Coast Highway
Suite 201
South Laguna, CA 92677
(714) 499-3889

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol Information (NCALI)
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20852
(301) 468-2600

National Clearinghouse for Drug Abuse Information
P.O. Box 1908
Rockville, MD 20850
(301) 443-6500

National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA)
700 Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611-2571
(312) 787-0977

National Council on Alcoholism
12 West 21st Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 206-6770

National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth
1820 Franwall Avenue
Suite 16
Silver Spring, MD 20902
1-800-544-KIDS

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Office of Alcohol Countermeasures
700 Seventh Street SW
Washington, DC 20590
(202) 426-2180

National Parents Resource Institute on Drug Education (PRIDE)
Robert W. Woodruff Volunteer Center
100 Edgewood Avenue
Suite 1216
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 658-2548

National Urban League
Youth Programs
500 East 62nd Street
New York, NY 10021
(212) 310-9000

Office of Smoking and Health
Technical Information Center
5600 Fishers Lane
Park Building, Room 1-10
Rockville, MD 20857
(301) 443-1690

Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Other Drug Information
1954 East Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53704
(608) 263-2797

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We hope that *Communicating With Youth About Alcohol: Methods, Messages, and Materials* has been helpful, and that you will recommend it to others. Please take a moment to write the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol Information (NCALI) and tell us of your impressions of this publication, as well as areas of concern that you would like us to address in future publications about youth and alcohol. We welcome your comments with the anticipation that they will help us serve you better in the future.

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